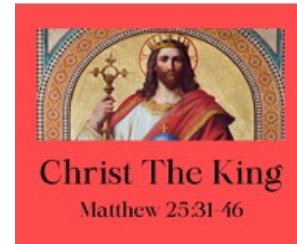


Todd Misfeldtⁱ

Introduction

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- Thank you Hardy for the music and singing.
- My name is Todd Misfeldt.
- It is a pleasure to be before you again.

Church Calendar

- Welcome to the Sunday after thanksgiving.
- I hope and pray that Thanksgiving was a day of joy and blessings for each one of you.
- Perhaps it provided an opportunity to strengthen family ties or to build new friendships over a shared Thanksgiving meal.

- Today marks the last Sunday of the year, according to the church calendar.
- You may not be aware of it, but there is a church calendar.
- Next Sunday is Advent and the beginning of the new church year.

- This Sunday, the final Sunday of the church calendar celebrates CHRIST THE KINGⁱⁱ
- As we journey through the church year, we recall Jesus's birth, his proclamation of the good news of salvation, the sacrifice he made for our sins, and the growth of the Christian Church.
- Christ the King is a fitting theme to end the year on.

Threefold Office

- Traditionally, Jesus is seen as having a threefold office: prophet, priest, and king.
- During Jesus's life on earth, we see him as primarily a teacher or prophet,
 - while also serving as a priest, an intermediary between people and God.
- Most of the church calendar is dedicated to remembering these two roles of Jesus.
- This morning, however, we remember and honor Jesus's role as a King, one of whose duties is to judge.

Scripture

- Let's turn to our scripture for today, Matthew 25:31–46, also known as the parable of *The Sheep and the Goats* in your NIV bible.
- Let me read it to you now.

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Matthew 25:31–46 - The Sheep and the Goats

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

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Context

- Is there anyone here struggling to understand this passage?
- Please know that it is okay to find some aspects unclear.
- I remember the first time that I really paid attention to this passage, I was puzzled. It seemed to come out of nowhere. I had to really think about what it meant.
- Among scholars too, there are a number of different interpretations of this passage.
(pause)
- To being to understand this passage, we must consider what comes before and after the it in Matthew's Gospel.
- This is called the 'context' of the passage – what surrounds it gives us a clue of the author's intent.
- This passage comes at the end of a long sequence of Jesus' teachings through parables.
- And the last few of these parables focus on the end times.
- After this passage, there is no more teaching. Matthew recounts the events of Jesus' betrayal, death, and resurrection.
- From the position of this passage in Matthew's Gospel and the rest of Chpt. 25, it is clear that it pertains to the end times.
- While this conclusion may not be groundbreaking, it does affirm our initial impression.

Judgement By the King

- In *The Sheep and the Goats*, we see Jesus returning as king, to pass judgement upon all humankind.
- The concept of a king serving as a judge might seem peculiar to us.
- We are used to systems of government
 - where executive and judicial roles are distinctly separate.
- Historically, however, these responsibilities were often consolidated into the singular role of the king.
 - Consider the example of King Solomon (1 Kings 3:16–28), who presided over the dispute between two women, each claiming to be the mother of the same child.
- King Jesus proceeds to judge us by separating us, placing some on his right - a position of honor (1 Kings 2:19; Ps 45:9) - and the rest on his left.
- Those on his right, he calls ‘blessed by my Father’ and tells them to take their inheritance, their salvation.

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...Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, ... ³⁵ For I was hungry and you... (Matt 25:34-35, NIV)

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- Additionally, Jesus tells them why.
- They have demonstrated that they are blessed by their actions: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, showing hospitality to the stranger, giving clothes to the needy, comfort for the sick and visiting the prisoner.

How are we saved?

- If we consider only this passage without the rest of scripture, we might mistakenly conclude that the people on the right hand of Jesus have earned their salvation solely through their good works alone.
- However, if we step back and consider all of Jesus' teachings, we know we are saved through faith in Jesus.
 - Our faith is demonstrated through our works, we don't earn our salvation because of our works.
- We must remember that salvation ultimately hinges on God's grace and Jesus's sacrifice, not through anything that we do.
- John Calvin, a renowned theologian, writes of this passageⁱⁱⁱ:

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“For by calling them *blessed of the Father*, (Jesus) he reminds them, that their salvation proceeded from the undeserved favour of God.” (Calvin)

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- So, it is God who deserves the credit for our salvation, not our deeds.

What Made Them Righteous?

- Next, the righteous—those who live rightly in response to God’s grace—reply to King Jesus that they have not done any of these things for him.
- They minister to the people around them, not to Jesus.
- They don’t think that they have done anything special or extraordinary.

- The righteous on Jesus’ right, were blessed by the Father and they had faith.
- In faith, they listened to the guidance of the Holy Spirit by which they were transformed.
- They perform the acts of service in response to a loving God and emulated his love for humanity.
- Their acts showed they had been transformed by their faith and the Holy Spirit.
 - They had so thoroughly incorporated their faith into their everyday actions, that they didn’t even notice that they were loving Jesus as they were ministering to those around them.

- This behavior was so natural to them that it was nothing special to them, nothing that was worth remembering as extraordinary.
- So much so that they were surprised when Jesus told them they were ministering to him.

Calvin - WVPC

- It is important for us to remember that our transformation and righteousness come from God's grace,
- John Calvin reminds us that ultimately, eternal life comes through God's grace.
- He reminds us that merely obeying God, fulfilling the law of God doesn't deserve any reward.
- - It is what God expects of us.
 - The danger is we can expect a reward just by obeying God.
 - An analogy is in our everyday work when we do the bare minimum tasks required by our job and then expect a bonus for our work.
 - This isn't how it usually works.
 - Our reward, eternal life, comes through God's grace^{iv} and the work of Jesus, not our own efforts.

Reward Based Actions? WVPC

- We all start from a fallen state.
- We can't help ourselves or our behavior.
- Then God showers us with his grace.
- We are touched by the Holy Spirit.
- We are blessed by the inspiration from the Holy Spirit and we are transformed. We want to obey God's will.

- In our journey through life, the Holy Spirit's leading is God teaching us, much like how good parents guide their children.

- When our children are young, we teach them right from wrong.
- As good parents, we hope that our children will learn how to act rightly not because of fear of punishment, but because they will eventually understand that it is in their best interest and because they love their parents and want to obey them.
- Similarly, the Holy Spirit guides us as a parent takes the hand of a toddler and gently guides them towards safety and away from danger.

- For new Christians, the bible gives us invaluable guides such as the Ten Commandments and the teachings that Jesus gave us.
- As we mature as a Christian, we are transformed into the righteous.
- Our behavior shifts from being a conscious effort to an unconscious practice.
- We are transformed.
- Ultimately, our actions become instinctual, not encumbered by the thought process, with no thought of any reward.
- Then we are righteous and blessed by God.

People on Jesus' left

- Now the King turns to the people on his left.
- He condemns them for what they did not do for him.
- Those on Jesus' left ask the same question as those on his right.

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“When did we see you?” (Matt 25:44, NIV)

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- However, rather than asking in surprise that Jesus was before them, they ask in denial that Jesus was ever before them.
- The implication is that if they recognized Jesus in their midst, they would have acted differently.
- They would have acted with compassion not because the love of Jesus had been incorporated into their being, but because they expected to be rewarded.
- They had not been transformed by the Holy Spirit.
- They had a different motivation, a selfish motivation.
- As people, our motivation to act in a certain way can be for a number of reasons.
 - It could be because of love, an expected reward, or fear of punishment.
- Jesus implies here that those on his left were motivated to serve the needy because of an expected reward. They were not motivated by love as those on Jesus' right were.

Why Sheep and Goats? – WVPC

- We know that this passage is about the end times.
- We can see that King Jesus will return and judge us.

- Why does Jesus call these two groups of people sheep and goats?
- The use of the terms "sheep" and "goats" may seem puzzling, but it aligns with Jesus' previous references to Himself as the Good Shepherd and His followers as His sheep.
- In John 10:27-28 Jesus says

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²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; (John 10:27-28, NIV)

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- By referring to those on His right as His sheep, Jesus includes all His followers throughout time.
- This reminds us of in all the other times in the Gospels where Jesus described his relationship with his sheep or us, his followers.

- Additionally, by mentioning sheep, goats, and judgement, Jesus also alludes to Ezekiel 34:17–19.
 - In this passage the LORD says that he will judge his flock
¹⁷ “ ‘As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats.
 - Goats are described as greedy, they eat their fill and trample the pasture with their feet, they drink the clean water and then muddy it with their feet. They are selfish and spoil what the shepherd has provided for the sheep.
- Behaving selfishly seems common in today’s world.
 - The Free Market System and Capitalism values of self-interest, self-promotion, and the domination of others through status and intimidation.
 - These values are praised in today’s culture.
 - However, these are the values of goats.
- Goat-type behavior is condemned in Ezekiel and again by Jesus here in Matt 25:32.
- It is not surprising that King Jesus, will judge and separate his followers, the sheep from the goats.
- The sheep, who follow Jesus, know his voice, and they are rewarded.

Are we ready?

- The point of this parable, and the parables leading up to it is:

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- Jesus is King.
- Jesus will return.
- Jesus will judge us.
- Our actions show who we are.

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- Jesus warns us to be ready for his return as King Jesus.
- The choice of which side Jesus places us on is up to each of us.

Take Inventory

- When we eventually experience the scene presented in this passage—when we see Jesus and his angels in front of us—it is too late to change.
- Instead, we must, take inventory of ourselves now.
- If you are still in the process of learning to obey – then keep up the good work. Strive to shift from acting out of obligation to acting in response to God’s love.
 - Allow yourself to be transformed.
- If your faith is strong, look for a weak point in your faith to grow in your love of God and make your transformation complete so you will stand in confidence before Christ the king.
- If you are only doing good because someone, perhaps God, is watching; put aside any selfish motivation and act out of a love for Jesus.
- None of us deserve to be God’s sheep – that is to be worthy to inherit the Kingdom of God.
- It is only because of God’s grace that we know Jesus and are transformed.
- It is only because of Jesus’ sacrifice that our sins are forgiven and that we can deserve to be called righteous and a child of God.

Conclusion

- The parable of the sheep and goats is a good conclusion to the church calendar, which ends with Jesus' return as king and judge.
- Today, the church calendar reminds us of Jesus' return as judge when our chance to affect our fate is over.
- The lesson for this Sunday then is to listen, learn, and apply everything that has been taught by Jesus while we can.

- The words that we want to hear when we stand in front of King Jesus are:
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"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Matt 25:34, NIV)
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- I pray that we will see each other on the right side.
- Next Sunday, we start the story of God's plan for us all over again when we begin the Advent season in anticipation of Jesus' coming to this earth to begin teaching us.

Closing Prayer

- Let us pray...
 - Dear God.
 - We are blessed by your grace.
 - We are grateful for what we do not deserve.
 - In humility we ask that you send your spirit upon us.
 - We pledge that we will take the spirit's message for us to heart
 - So that we might grow more each day and
 - Become transformed into who you want us to be, showing your love to others.
 - Thank you for the teaching and sacrifice of your son Jesus,
 - Through whom we can become worthy to take possession of the inheritance that you have prepared for us.
 - We are indeed blessed by you.
 - Amen

22:00

Wrap-up – The Refuge

- We would love to pray for those who want prayer.
 - Raise your hand and someone will come and pray with you.
- In a couple of minutes, we will have dessert.

Benediction

- ²⁰ Now...(may) our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,
²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will,
and may he work in us to do what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ,
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:20–21)

ⁱ Unless otherwise specified, all scripture is from *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

ⁱⁱ Consultation on Common Texts, [*Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2011).

ⁱⁱⁱ John Calvin and William Pringle, [*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*](#) (vol. 3; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 176–177.

^{iv} John Calvin and William Pringle, [*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*](#) (vol. 3; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 179.